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Scottish Bird News

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Global warming and Scottish land birds

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View from Cairn Gorm to Cairn Lochan, mid-May
Ian Francis

Scottish Bird News readers will be used to claims about harmful effects of global warming on Scottish land-birds. Here, Adam Watson criticises some of these claims, most of which have been in newspapers and magazines, but some in reports by organisations and consultants.

Many claims about climate change reveal inexperience of Scottish birds in both field and literature and press exaggerations exacerbate this. In December 2006, *The Observer* carried an article by its science editor. When interviewing me, he asked if Scottish alpine plants are moving uphill because of warmer climate, and soon would have nowhere to go. Witnessed by a colleague, I replied "I've seen no sign of it and no paper with good evidence of it". His article ran 'All native species are being pushed further and further up the mountains', said Watson. 'Soon they will have nowhere to go'. Enough said! Because the press can exaggerate, below I do not name anyone whose comments were reported by newspapers.

The *Press & Journal* of 4 February 2005 announced, 'Ptarmigan doomed, warn scientists'. We read that 'leading scientists' and 'experts' predict that a rise 'in world temperatures could soon make the bird extinct'. Then 'Ornithologists are also forecasting that future climate change could threaten the populations of other upland species such as' Greenshank, Red Grouse and Golden Plover. Such 'forecasts' are mere guesses, ignoring other factors such as habitat loss to tree-planting and overgrazing.

Wilder assertions were in *The Scotsman* of October 7, 2006, headed 'Is Ptarmageddon Day looming for many of Scotland's rare birds?'. The report continued 'Bird-watchers yesterday issued a warning to the Scottish executive that birds like the Ptarmigan, Snow Bunting and Dotterel could migrate to Norway, Greenland and Iceland if CO_2 emissions are not reduced'. 'But rising CO_2 emissions in recent years mean that the numbers of birds have fallen – the number of breeding pairs of Snow Buntings in Scotland has reduced in recent years to 100.' In reality, 100 pairs constitute the highest-ever estimate.

The Herald of 20 January 2007 reported a project on climate 'prediction', developed for the BBC, 'Rising temperatures are already believed to be causing semi-Arctic habitats to recede north or to higher ground, making life difficult for mountain birds, such as the Ptarmigan'. Use of the present tense is unjustified, for no good evidence of habitats receding north or moving uphill has been published, or for life being more difficult for Ptarmigan. And, 'There are areas of the Cairngorms

Male Dotterel near Glenshee *Ian Francis*

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which in the past have been covered by snow throughout the year. These permanent snow patches melted last year.

Ptarmigan in mist *Ian Francis*

This is having a big effect on bryophytes, including all sorts of mosses and liverworts, which depend on a permanent source of snow melt'. The data on snow in 2006 are published (A. Watson, D. Duncan & J. Pottie 2007, No Scottish snow survives until winter 2006/07. *Weather* 62, 71-73). However, the patches are only semi-permanent, and all melted in four other years since 1900. Also, no vegetation lies under the longest-lying snow, just gravel, and many species do not depend on permanent snow melt, but favour cold springs that are not under the longest-lying snow.

Invalid claims are not confined to newspapers and magazines. At a conference in Aviemore during autumn 2006, Jim Knight, Westminster Minister for Rural Affairs, announced a report on climate by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In a speech that mentioned Ptarmigan and Dotterel in the Cairngorms, he warned, 'warmer temperatures were pushing migrating species towards the poles'.

Scientific reports

In a press release (6 March, 2007), SNH announced 'The Long March – Spatial Adaptation to Climate Change', a project to help species move north as the climate warms. 'Duncan Stone is coordinating the strategy to identify potential barriers and geographical pinch-points where species might be prevented' from moving. An example was, 'Some woodland birds such as the Tree Creeper' move only 10 metres from woodland cover, though are capable of flying miles. This reveals inexperience of the field, for Tree Creepers and other woodland species often breed in small isolated plantations surrounded by miles of moorland. Again we see emphasis on a desk-project and on uncritical spin.

Consider two much-publicised habitats, the alpine zone and Caledonian pinewood. Many readers would regard *The state of the UK's birds 2004* as authoritative, because it was published by RSPB on behalf of seven voluntary and state organisations including BTO, SNH and English Nature. However, the 'Climate change' section shows surprising lack of field experience and critical thinking. 'The species likely to be at the most immediate risk of extinction in the UK are those that breed in the moss and lichen-dominated Arctic-alpine habitat found in the Cairngorms and a few other high-altitude areas in northern Scotland, such as Snow Buntings and Dotterels. As temperatures increase, so plant species from lower altitudes will begin to move up-slope and encroach on this already scarce habitat. As there is no higher altitude ground to move to, the total area of Arctic-alpine habitat in the UK will start to decrease and by 2050 it may have disappeared altogether'.

These claims rest on the assumption that temperature controls the area of alpine land and that climate is temperature. But alpine land comes to low altitudes in windy places, indeed close to sea-level in north Sutherland. Winters there are mild, with little snow and frost. Also, Britain has already become windier, and meteorologists predict more gales due to warming. This should expand the alpine zone downhill. Only a continental climate would move it uphill, as in the warmth after the last glaciers melted.

An RSPB report (2000, *Climate change*) claims, 'Ptarmigans – they could lose their last British sites in the Scottish highlands as the montane habitat they need disappears'. And, 'For some birds, particularly in Scotland, warmer winters may lead to the disappearance of the montane habitats on which they depend to breed. Under climate change, Dotterels, Ptarmigans, and Snow Bunting could die out'. This has the same flaws as above,

Research has revealed a trend for snow patches in Scotland to vanish more frequently (A. Watson, D. Duncan & J. Pottie 2006. Two Scottish snow patches survive until winter 2005/06. *Weather* 61, 132-134). If this trend continues, snow-patch vegetation may decline, which might adversely affect Ptarmigan and Snow Buntings. But there is no published evidence, and I know of no funded Scottish field research on populations of Ptarmigan or Snow Buntings in relation to climatic change.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority announced (*Strathspey & Badenoch Herald*, 28 February 2007) that it will lead on tackling climatic change. A spokesman was reported saying of the Cairngorms, 'obviously if there is less snow then we will have difficulty in protecting species such as the Ptarmigan'. Fine words, but new signs at roads into the Park cost £537,000 of taxpayers' money, while the Authority has funded no field research on habitats or species in relation to climatic change.

One would expect that bodies such as SNH would for years have been doing or commissioning much fieldwork on the topic. Big sums have gone to salaries of 'climate change officers' and to consultants for desk-reports. Their assertions belie surprising ignorance of the field and of past literature. Much of the little Scottish fieldwork on the topic since 1997 has involved individuals in their spare time, using their own money. So much more could have been achieved, had bodies such as SNH and CNPA funded fieldwork. Actions speak louder than words.

Almost all the publicity emphasises warming, but cooling is also a threat. Warming in the Arctic has released more fresh water from melting ice and snow, which has weakened the circulation that maintains the Gulf Stream. If the Stream were to become seriously weakened or switched off, Scotland would turn much colder, at least in the short run. This would severely affect agriculture and human life, let alone wildlife. Results might be more catastrophic than those from continued warming. This does not lessen warnings about more warming. It adds to them, showing that risks are many and unpredictable.

Caledonian pinewoods

Let us turn to Caledonian pinewood in *The state of the UK's birds 2004*. We read, 'The Scottish Crossbill, the UK's only endemic bird, has been identified as being potentially at risk of extinction owing to climate warming. By the end of the 21st century, the climate 'envelope' occupied by Scottish Crossbills might only be found in Iceland and so they will either have to move (which seems highly unlikely), adapt to new conditions in Scotland or face extinction.' The flaw is the assumption that temperature controls pinewood habitat.

Continued on page 5.

Deeside pinewoods - habitat for Scottish Crossbills
Ian Francis

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***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

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NEWS & NOTICES

New SOC Members

We welcome the following new members to the club: **Ayrshire** Mr C Devlin, Mr N O'Donnell, **Caithness** Mr A Scott, **Central Scotland** Ms M Calder, **Clyde** Mr D Eadie, Mr D Hennessy, Mr D O'Brien, Dr M & Dr A Watt, **Dumfries** Christina W.C. Robertson MBE, **England, Wales & NI** Mr A Dobson, Mr & Mrs W Hamilton, Mr I G Jackson, Mr D Ohara, Dale & Alistair Thomson, **Fife** Mr S J Hayhow, Mr D Hill, Mr D W Oliver, Ms V Wootton, **Grampian** Mrs L Silcock, Prof Nigel H Trewin, **Highland** Mr M Conway, **Lothian** Mr P Burns, Mr & Mrs K Christie, Mr & Mrs S Edington, Mrs A Garven, Mr & Mrs Jamieson, Mr & Mrs D Lamont, Mr R G Livingstone, Mr & Mrs I McGregor, Ms F McIntyre, Mr McMillan & Family, Mrs J Murray, Mr & Mrs S Newlands, Mr M Radka, Ms L Reid, Mr G A Rider, Mr R B Turnbull, Mrs K Wallace, Earl of Wemyss, Mr A Wishart, **Tayside** Mr D Carrie, Mr G W Evans, Mr & Mrs K Kidston, Mr N Mitchell, **West Galloway** Mr E Macdonald

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are – **February: 1st** £30 Jimmy Maxwell, **2nd** £20 C.K.Mylne **3rd** £10 I.L.Hopkins. **March: 1st** £30 Mrs.J.Mc Neill, **2nd** £20 D.Boomer, **3rd** £10 H.Robb. **April: 1st** £30 Mrs.V.McLellan, **2nd** £20 B.Ethridge, **3rd** £10 B.S.Smith

Please note that the "new year" starts in June and new members would be very welcome. They must be over 18 and Club members. **Please contact – Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH**

SOC Book Fair, Saturday 28th April

Is there such a word as "ornithobibliophile"? I suppose there must be, because I'm one – a hopeless bird-book addict! So when the SOC held its second Book Fair at Waterston House, I just had to go along. Rarely is such an array of bird books available in one place in Scotland.

Visitors browsing *Bill Torrance*

Interest in the new display cases bought with proceeds from the SOC 200 Club *Bill Torrance*

Three specialist sellers of second-hand bird and wildlife books were there, as well as the RSPB from Vane Farm with a selection of new books at reduced prices and of course the Waterston Library's own extensive stock of surplus and duplicate books from generous donations and legacies.

With prices ranging from 50p upwards (quite a long way upwards in some cases), there was something within everyone's price range. There was a surge of interest at the start – the car park was virtually full when I arrived – and a steady flow of visitors throughout the day. A rough calculation at the end of the day suggested that around £1000 was raised for SOC funds. I would like to thank Jay Books, Pandion Books, Shearwater Books and the RSPB for bringing along a good range of stock; I hope they made enough to make it worth their while returning next time. Thanks are also due to Jean and a number of volunteers for making it all run smoothly.

So next time, I would like to encourage all you ornithobibliophiles out there to come along and find that scarce item you've been searching for. Those less hopelessly afflicted should also come in – you will find something you didn't know you wanted but really *must* buy!

Paul Speak

Wing-tagged Buzzards in the Stirling area

This summer, the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group will be marking up to 100 Buzzards with wing-tags as part of a detailed study of this species. Please check any Buzzards in this area for tags. Any sightings will be gratefully received by David Anderson (01877 382383 or david.anderson@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

Volunteers at work

The Stuffing Party

When you receive your quarterly copy of SBN, spare a thought for the band of volunteers who give of their time to organise the contents of members' mail packets, checking that the magazine and all the extra appropriate leaflets are included. This "stuffing" day is usually called at fairly short notice and the careful work necessary is balanced by liberal cups of coffee and reported to be very convivial. Thanks to all who carry out this usually unseen service.

Waterbirds around the World book launched

The 19th March, saw the Scottish launch of the *Waterbirds around the World* book at a ceremony in Edinburgh.

These are the proceedings from the *Waterbirds around the World* Conference that was held in Edinburgh in April 2004. 456 Technical experts and policy makers from 90 different countries from around the world gathered to discuss how to protect the world's migratory waterbirds and their crucial wetlands upon which they depend. The outcome of this conference was the Edinburgh Declaration, an action list for governments.

Edited by Gerard Boere (Wetlands International), Colin Galbraith (Scottish Natural Heritage) and David Stroud (Joint Nature Conservation Committee), and supported by a team of editorial assistants, it represents a monumental effort. They have pulled together the work of 452 authors from 59 countries, in 264 papers and reviews relating to 614 waterbird species from 162 countries, all within 940 pages. Together, these give a telling insight into the status of the world's waterbird species and their migration routes, and it has new data on 170 globally and near-threatened species.

The key message from the meeting was that despite global conservation efforts, waterbirds are being sidelined by economic development. Too few conservation measures are currently being undertaken for globally threatened species.

As a result, many wetlands of critical importance for long-distance migrants have been degraded and many populations of birds are disappearing. This is not only because of the loss and degradation of wetlands, but are also due to the impacts of pollution and hunting that can be unsustainable.

In order to address the decline in waterbirds, the overall priority is for inter-sectoral action to halt and reverse the loss and degradation of wetlands. By using a "flyway approach", wetland conservation will contribute to the survival of waterbirds as well as to people's livelihoods. Currently, most major infrastructure developments take place in ignorance of these implications and many have a flyway-wide impact. International action is too weak or un-coordinated and the range of wetland services and values are largely ignored in planning processes. This is leading to further cycles of wetland degradation, poverty and species loss.

Left to right: ***Chris Waltho****, SOC Vice-president with* ***Janet Crummy****, SOC President.*
Des Thompson, SNH

Published by the Stationary Office, full details, ordering and downloadable versions of all the papers and presentations can be found on the JNCC website http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3891. ***A detailed review will appear in the next SBN.***

Left to right: ***Mr David Stroud****, Senior Ornithologist JNCC, Member of Ramsar Convention Scientific & Technical Review Panel,* ***Dr Nick Davidson,*** *Deputy Secretary General, Ramsar Convention Secretariat,* ***Dr Gerard Boere****, Associated Expert, Wetlands International (Secretary General of WI at the time of Waterbirds around the world Conference),* ***Mr Andrew Thin****, Chairman, SNH,* ***Ward Hagemeijer****, Programme Head Biodiversity Conservation, Wetlands International,* ***Prof Colin Galbraith****, Director of Science & Advisory Services SNH.*
Des Thompson, SNH

Continued from page 2.

The main Caledonian pinewoods survived because the glaciers left very freely drained soils (often sand or gravel, as in Abernethy) that are acidic because of the bedrocks from which they originated. In a climate with more precipitation than evaporation and transpiration, this produced podzols, so infertile that they could not be cultivated.

Soil changes under natural conditions are extremely slow, and the consensus is that it may take 1000 years for soil in temperate regions to reach a relatively stable state. Also, soils are resistant to change under natural conditions. Hence the infertile podzols of Caledonian pinewood should continue, as should plants that prefer them, such as heather and pine, and animals that use these plants, such as crossbills. Also, Scots pine thrives on land far hotter than Scotland, such as some Mediterranean regions. The key factor is soil.

The assertion that the 'climate envelope' of Scottish Crossbills might be found only in Iceland implies extinction of our pinewood and its colonisation of Iceland. This too is unrealistic and belies inexperience. Icelandic soils are derived from volcanic rock, mostly base-rich. The fertile freely-drained soils favour birch, not pine. Also we read, 'More worryingly, climate warming may also lead to the loss of species restricted to breeding.....in northern Scotland, such as Whooper Swans, Arctic Skuas and Greenshanks'. The Greenshank claim seems odd, for the bird nests across vast Eurasian regions where summer heat far exceeds that in north Scotland.

Impacts on alpine species

In 2005, *The Mountains of Northern Europe*, published on behalf of SNH and the Centre for Mountain Studies, included a chapter on climate change. It is well known that air temperature falls with altitude, 1∞C per 200-275 m. If mean temperature rises by 1∞C, it was asserted that 'Organisms inhabiting arctic-alpine habitats above 600 m in 1960-91 will therefore need to move to 800-875 m to experience similar conditions. This would result in about 90% and 96% reductions in arctic-alpine extent in Scotland and Wales, respectively.' It was claimed that declines of Ptarmigan, Dotterel, Snow Buntings and Mountain Hares would be likely, and certain plant species would lose all 'climate space' in Britain. Again, these assertions rest on the fallacious assumptions that climate is temperature and that habitat is determined solely by temperature. The authors ignore wind as a factor causing alpine habitat and predicted to increase with warming. At root, the concept of 'climate space' or 'climate envelope' is uncritical when taken thus far. Naming Mountain Hares is dubious, for their densities on moorland generally far exceed those on alpine land . And they thrive at sea-level in the mild winters of west Scotland and Ireland. Their habitat depends on short food-plants, not temperature.

In *The Scotsman* (November 4 1999), a senior SNH officer was reported saying of Scottish alpine land, 'several bird species, already in decline, would soon be on the brink of extinction. In as little as 50 years, he predicts breeding pairs of Ptarmigan will fall from 10,000 to 1,000, and Dotterel from 840 pairs to less than 50. He said SNH would now be ....updating its model for predicting the effects of climate change'. Such numerical detail cannot be attributed to press overstatement, so must have been said. There is no good evidence of these species being 'already in decline', or of 10,000 Ptarmigan pairs. The 'predicted' 90% Ptarmigan reduction tallies with the invalid SNH assertion (above) of 90% less alpine land, so is evidently based on it. The Dotterel decline (over 94%) tallies with neither, so seems baseless. Note that SNH would be 'updating its model', not funding new fieldwork.

'Climate space'

A paper appeared in 2006 (B. Huntley and six co-authors, *Ibis* 148, supplement 1, 8-28) on 'Potential impacts of climatic change upon geographical distributions of birds'. Based entirely on modelling, it compares atlas information on bird distribution with air temperature, precipitation and sunshine. The authors claim a good fit between distribution and weather factors, as is to be expected. Maps show current distributions of several species, beside distributions based on predicted changes in temperature, precipitation and sunshine. 'Of the European species modelled, 11 have zero overlap between their potential future and present distributions in Europe for all three future climate scenarios explored; these include the endemic *Loxia scotica* (Scottish Crossbill), that thus must be considered to be at extreme risk of global extinction as a result of climatic change'. As mentioned above, this omits that the key natural determinant of the crossbill's pinewood habitat is soil. Authors adduce no data or analyses to back their claims on birds, and cite no past publications of theirs that give such data or analyses. Such a lack is unsound practice in any original scientific paper whose results have not been published previously, as is the case here, and unsound for editors and referees.

One may ask why the above bodies and their scientists ignore the scientific method and its testing of assumptions and alternative hypotheses. Perhaps they wish to jolt people out of complacency about global warming. This, however, would be unethical for bodies claiming to rest their policies upon science. Also, it carries risks. Unscientific, ideological critics of conservation effort by these bodies are thereby handed arguments for discrediting them and lobbying politicians to curb them.

Scientific research needed

Global warming poses grave world threats to man and the wild species that now depend on us. Scotland also faces severe potential threats from warming, including possible cooling due to the Gulf Stream being switched off. The public and politicians need reliable information. Yet, state and voluntary conservation bodies do little new fieldwork. The emphasis is on woolly assertions in desk-reports and uncritical papers. 'Spin' on climate often pervades conservation bodies, when the need for rigour and critical refutation of hypotheses is paramount. I have come across defensive attitudes by some individuals when their unjustified claims are criticised, yet science needs criticism. Also, they evidently ignore the wealth of understanding on habitat, which helps explain the abundance and distribution of plants and animals. Air temperature is only one factor, not necessarily crucial, often not crucial.

View from Ben Macdui northwards - mid-May
Ian Francis

This article will have done some good if it helps readers be critical and check whether claims rest on evidence rather than bias, and if they spur organisations to fund fieldwork. There is also one final point. In 2007 the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology is to close stations at Monkswood and Banchory, noted for past and present fieldwork on climatic change in relation to wildlife, and the Meteorological Office faces cuts in its budget for research including work on climate. Westminster and Holyrood governments could have stopped these changes, but acquiesced in them. Yet in January-April 2007 the Prime Minister, Chancellor Gordon Brown and Scottish Ministers proclaimed that climate change is the greatest threat to man, and Holyrood First and Deputy First Ministers said Scotland should be a "science nation". Spin rules.

Adam Watson
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Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

Eastgate Theatre *Lang Stewart*

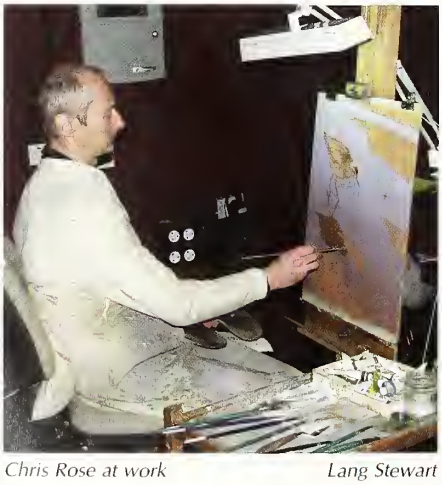
This year's Conference on 18th March, hosted by SOC Borders Branch and BTO Scotland, offered a blend of ornithological studies undertaken in the Borders by both volunteer and professional observers. Eastgate Theatre, Peebles was the excellent venue, the 120 delegates being welcomed with coffee after reception and the chance to begin browsing the variety of stalls – activities which were enjoyed with not a little good-natured congestion.

SOC President Janet Crummy gave the opening address to begin the Conference in the main hall which gave excellent viewing for all presentations with a very good and comfortable tiered seating arrangement. The highlight of the day's proceedings was an ongoing painting "performance" by the renowned Scottish wildlife artist Chris Rose who, starting with a blank canvas and in full view of the audience, gradually created a painting. His updates, given between each lecture, gave a rare and fascinating insight into how a top painter builds up a detailed painting of a well-known bird.

Chris Rose - A Brush with Birds

Chris Rose appeared on stage with his easel and various artist's equipment. With a flourish he donned a much-used painting smock and modestly explained to the audience that to sit in the full glare of a spotlight and paint a bird in front of a gathering of possibly the most "bird-wise" and critical group in Scotland was rather suicidal.

In November, Chris (a member of the Borders Branch) gave a splendid presentation on "The Antarctic" to the Borders Group, which included many very evocative "ice scape" slides by his wife. Etched in my memory is an image of Chris sitting all muffled up before an easel amidst a sea of ice with the horizon stretching to infinity... a direct contrast to this present situation with the artist in the spotlight, on stage, in the close confines of the theatre.



Chris Rose at work *Lang Stewart*

To the actual painting; an oil of a Redshank in a slightly stooping characteristic posture - delicate, moving, possibly hesitant, obviously seeking tiny molluscs or crustaceans, its searching eye very dominant and central to the work which is being gradually rendered with such consummate skill. The subject is set in a background of tidal sandy flats with little runnels of shallow water forming a bright, almost lacy pattern. Chris explained that as much time and attention had to be devoted to the background as to the bird.

He would later reveal, during the final removal of equipment from the hall, that the mixing and preparation of oil paints is very time consuming and important. In fact each little "blob" of prepared colour would be meticulously lifted from the using palette and stored on a large dinner plate, so that any final "touch ups" would be absolutely true to colour. As the painting gradually took shape as the day wore on, the main difficulty for the audience was to concentrate on each speaker and not on the artistic techniques constantly on view. This was a wonderful opportunity to view and enjoy a process which is normally conceived in the privacy of the studio.

Campbell McLellan

Ray Murray - The Changing Avifauna of the Borders

As first speaker, Ray began his presentation on the forthcoming SOC publication "*Birds of Scotland* "(Forrester, Andrews et al. 2007) by posing the obvious question Why do we need a third "Birds of Scotland"? The first was the two volumes produced by the doughty Misses Baxter and Rintoul in 1953, and then the slimmer volume written by Valerie Thom in 1986. Perhaps for some 'pc' reason he did not point out that BS3, as the current draft is affectionately known, will be the first with male authorship! Sources of information for the compilation of an Avifauna of Scotland have increased almost exponentially over the last 60 years. In simplest terms, the number of Scottish bird records (reported sightings) available in 1950 was perhaps 50,000, and in 1980 some 200,000, whereas by 2004 it had reached 1 million. During this time the number of species on the Scottish List has risen from 214 to 509.

Ray at the BS3 stand *Lang Stewart*

Whilst the increasing variety of vagrant birds reaching our shores may be interesting as curiosities, or as 'ticks' for the twitchers among us, they may have more significance as precursors of future breeding species. Indeed the number of breeding species has also grown substantially over the period although we have suffered some temporary or permanent extinctions. Apart from the new species, there are many changes in distribution and abundance of breeding and wintering species in Scotland. Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Jay are examples of increasing species, while Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler are decreasing. Ray illustrated the impressive expansion in range and abundance of Nuthatch, mainly in South Scotland, over the last few years and predicted further northwards expansion.

The financial success of the BS3 project has been greatly helped by a number of generous sponsors, but Ray reminded members of the importance to Club cash-flow of ordering their copy at the reduced pre-publication price.

Graham Pyatt

John Relaxing between lectures *Lang Stewart*

John Calladine - Short-eared Owls – can we monitor them?

John opened his talk by explaining that within the UK there are 6 SPAs which are known to hold Short-eared Owls and that, consequently, we are obliged to know their numbers. However, the Short-eared Owl is our least known predatory bird largely as a result of its moorland habitat, which makes access for population monitoring difficult. In Scotland, which holds 4 of the SPAs, only the Orkney population is well documented. Much of the data presented for the UK Short-eared Owl population are what might be considered "best guess" figures as they are often noted during other surveys such as, for example, Hen Harrier and Merlin, where time of day might not be ideal. Also, their numbers are known to fluctuate because of their dependency on the field vole population.

John then brought us up-to-date with the ongoing work initiated in 2006, after a literature review in 2005, on monitoring methods in pilot studies in Ayrshire, Perthshire and the Borders. The first method required four survey periods between March to July from a fixed point within specified times of first light and darkness. Among other results, the pilot study showed that there was no great diurnal variation in sightings and most birds were first seen at a range of 470-570 metres. Following these results, a modified method is to be tested in 2007 which involves two surveys, one in April/May and the second in June, traversing a road or track that crosses moorland and making counts at points at 1km separation over a 3hour period. All other birds observed will be recorded in addition to the main target, Short-eared Owls. John concluded this very interesting presentation with a call for volunteers to assist this very worthwhile task.

John Reid

The morning coffee break was taken in the reception area and the air was filled with lively debate as people from the birding world swapped ideas and information and caught up with old friends. Then on to the second half of the morning.

Malcolm Henderson -Goshawks in the Borders

Malcolm used his time fruitfully as Wildlife Liaison Officer with Lothians and Borders Police, developing the Borders Goshawk Study Group and building on the previous work by Petty and Anderson. It is assumed that , having previously been persecuted to extinction, the local population of Goshawks in SE.Scotland and N. Northumberland originated from a very small number of birds accidentally or deliberately released 40 years ago by falconers.

Numbers have slowly built up to approximately 100 pairs in the area, all nesting in coniferous plantations. Forest Enterprise staff has been protective and helpful with location and support. Some private landowners and their staff have also helped, but persecution, especially near game-rearing pens, continues to be a problem. In the study area, 2600 young birds are known to have fledged, 75% of them having been ringed.

Surprisingly the recovery rate is less than 2%. The study has recently included DNA sampling which indicates that the local population has originated from only two females. Malcolm gave some indication of clues for locating nest sites, including moult feathers, droppings, food remains and the presence of a plucking post.

Generally the adults are noisy in spring at first light and in early autumn when young are being fed. His slides clearly demonstrated the degree of tree-climbing involved with the enthusiastic young support team skilfully reaching the nest and lowering the young to the ground for processing.

Nest examination and food remains indicate that Goshawks are fairly omnivorous, eating birds, amphibians and small mammals. In this area the main prey are pigeons and corvids. As for the future, suitable habitat and prey are secure. Reduction in persecution through prosecution and education should see a gradual and sustained population increase.

Malcolm Ro

The RSPB stall *Lang Stewart*

Malcolm and Ian Henderson *Lang Stewart*

Ian Henderson - Bird Response to Cereal Management and Field Margins

From an uninspiring title, Ian gave an illuminating and concise account of trials carried out in winter cereal crops involving cooperating farmers from East Anglia to East Lothian. He gave us the history of the problem, citing the 52% decline in Skylark numbers in arable crops. We were then treated to the brief summary of the trial and its results. With an agricultural background, I found the talk fascinating and vital as Skylarks lie nicely in a food chain between plants and predators.

Ian's trial had four systems: 1)crop alone 2) crop with a field margin 3)crop with bare patches and 4)crop with bare patches and field margins. The explanation of all these was well covered by the speaker to the benefit of his birding audience. The Skylarks were greatly aided in their nesting habits by the use of "patches" provided that such sites were at least 80 metres from the field margin and at least 4m2.

The use of cameras at some sites allowed Ian to enrich our knowledge of mammalian predators, especially with a photograph of a Brown Rat passing a sitting Skylark, while the speaker informed us that rats did take eggs and young if they were left unattended. No corvids visited a nest in the trial.

Ian concluded by stating that crop patches were easily created by tractor operators whilst sowing grain and proved to be very effective in encouraging Skylarks to nest. He particularly thanked all those cooperating and mentioned East Lothian farmer Mike McDowell as an excellent example.

Brian Smith

A nice buffet lunch was provided in the Green Tree Restaurant situated next door to the Theatre.

Chris Rose discussing his paintings *Lang Stewart*

Delegates were able to walk round the various exhibits including new and second-hand books, BTO, SOC(mainly the BS3 update), the local RSPB group and an interesting selection of Chris Rose's paintings. Soon it was time for the afternoon's programme.

Pete Gordon – Tweed Valley Ospreys

Pete Gordon, former RSPB Regional Officer in the Borders, now RSPB Conservation Officer for Nethybridge, spoke on the recolonisation of the Tweed Valley by that charismatic bird, the Osprey. It was partly due to the late George Waterston's inspired decision in the early 1960s to establish a public hide to view the Loch Garten Ospreys, that the British public has increasingly shown an interest in conservation.

For years there had been rumours that Ospreys seen in the Borders were nesting. To try to settle the question, Pete involved volunteers from the start. Watching for Ospreys fishing on the Tweed and at various lochs in this large region, these volunteers proved to be an enormous help in locating potential nesting areas. Today most nests are on artificial platforms deep in afforested countryside. (Perhaps a similar scheme to use volunteers and provide more platforms could be used in Dumfries and Galloway, a region where there are sightings of Ospreys every year, and where the one known nest can be seen on CCTV in Wigtown's Town Hall)

Peter before his talk *Lang Stewart*

By 1994 when Ospreys were being seen annually in the Tweed Valley, it became clear that it was only a matter of time before they nested and in 1998 the first nest was located. In 2006 there were six nests in the Borders from which ten young hatched. One of these nests included an almost unheard-of clutch of four eggs, all of which hatched, and even the runt of that brood survived. Luckily the success of this particular brood was watched on CCTV. This kind of viewing, at Kailzie Gardens and Glentress Forest, enables the public to enjoy the daily life of Ospreys but keeps details of their location secret to avoid disturbance. Again Pete acknowledged the invaluable help from the volunteers who man these two centres.

Joan Howie

John Reid browsing *Lang Stewart*

Andrew Bramhall - Swanning around in the Borders

Andrew began by giving an overview of Mute and Whooper Swans in the Scottish Borders over the last 25 years. Swans are long-lived birds of peculiar habits: highly territorial on breeding sites yet very mobile - the Whoopers and Bewicks being long-haul migrants of course, but movements of the more sedentary Mutes have provided fascinating, and often surprising, data through the ringing schemes, e.g. dispersal from the Borders to Angus and Lincolnshire.

Andrew explained that since they are such big birds, the public notice them more often and record their appearance in a locality, aiding monitoring. They sometimes present traffic hazards on major roads - Borders police have a host of reports concerning disruption of traffic by swans! The tales of social (and anti-social) behaviour within the genus rang familiar bells in the ears of the SOC audience. Who of us have not become entranced by the comings and goings of swans on our own local patch? But the statistics and anecdotes from the whole Borders region (including Northumberland) for a quarter of a century made most interesting listening, illustrated by lovely images.

Andrew (right) chatting to Jeremy Greenwood
Lang Stewart

Of course, the swans also suffer terribly from mindless human interference and premeditated abuse. We are sadly all to familiar with instances of the ingestion of lead shot, and tortures inflicted by discarded fishing hooks and nylon line,collisions with power lines and fatalities due to barbed wire. We can all do something in such circumstances. Even more abhorrent is the deliberate destruction of swans' nests and the pricking of their eggs by anglers which seems almost incredible in the allegedly "environmentally enlightened" 21st century.

Young birdwatchers need to meet dedicated birders such as Andrew - you can bring anyone into birdwatching - just listen for the signs and bring them into the SOC - Scotland's Bird Club. Andrew Bramhall is WEBS organiser for the Scottish Borders. If you would like to help with WEBS surveys or have information on swans in your locality, please contact your local bird recorder or SOC Headquarters.

Andrew gave credits to Alan Brown, Dr. Chris Spray and John Coleman for their assistance.

Duncan Watt

Jeremy Greenwood - Atlasing: Fieldwork for all

This was Jeremy Greenwood's last speech at an SOC Conference before retiring as Director of BTO. Far from being in any way a terminal discourse, however, his lecture was infused with vigour, hope and anticipation for the future collaboration between BTO and SOC in the field of Atlas recording.

He gave us a detailed account of all the previous Atlases, stressing the important data each had contributed to the national conservation scene. He then outlined the coming joint effort which would produce a combined breeding season and wintering Atlas starting in 2007 and finishing by 2011.

Both amateur and professional fieldwork were vital to the completeness of this work and Jeremy took trouble to emphasise that it should always be an enjoyable exercise.

He looked forward to a promising working partnership between BTO and SOC in the future – a lecture overflowing with typical enthusiasm and optimism.

It was then time for Chris Rose to do his "Final Brush" and display the finished Redshank in its beautiful estuarine setting. It was agreed to auction the painting with the proceeds being kindly donated to the SOC. At this point Chris modestly fled the room allowing Janet Crummy to conduct a jolly and keenly competitive auction which raised £305. A "snip" at that price!

Dr. Nick Carter, Director of Development BTO, summed up the Conference with some appropriate remarks paying due tribute to Borders Group and especially Vicky McClellan who had worked tirelessly to ensure its smooth running and organising all of the very demanding logistics of feeding and entertaining the delegates.

Janet and Jeremy jointly closed the Conference and finished by signing the "agreement" which confirmed that SOC and BTO will work jointly....

Jeremy and Janet Crummy getting it together
Lang Stewart

Most delegates agreed that this was an excellent Conference with some of the best, most varied and interesting talks at an SOC event in recent years!

Jimmy Maxwell

(my thanks to all the speaker write-up conscripts and Lang Stewart for his excellent photographic work on the day and additional helpful information. – JM).

The finished Redshank *Lang Stewart*

Making YOUR bird records count!

Wood Pigeon flock *Clive R McKay*

The SOC and Scottish Natural Heritage have embarked on an exciting new project that will transform the way SOC manages and exchanges bird data and help unlock the huge value held within the hundreds of thousands of bird records collected by birdwatchers across Scotland every year.

In April last year I was appointed as Scottish Bird Records Co-ordinator, a part-time post jointly funded by SOC and SNH. The over-riding aim of the post is to make your bird records count! This will be achieved by a) developing a central computerised archive for all Scottish bird records so that records can be stored safely and analysed at the touch of a button, and b) by uploading these records onto the National Biodiversity Network (NBN, see below) so that the information is available to a wide audience on the internet.

Methods of data storage and "data capture" (i.e. collation of records) varies across Scotland's 21 Local Recording Areas. These include good old-fashioned paper record sheets to computerised spreadsheets and biological recording software programmes. It is estimated that Scottish bird recorders collate over 450,000 records per year! The task of storing these records gets ever larger, but this is one field in which the computer has come to the fore. Bird records can now be entered onto an easy to use bird recording database designed for the SOC by Mark Holling and Ray Murray (see Bird Recording in Scotland on the SOC website http://www.the-soc.org.uk). This or similar systems has been adopted by the Borders, Clyde, Highland and Lothian recording areas, to great effect.

Recording made easy

One of the beauties of using a bird recording database is that the computer can greatly help in "looking up" information automatically and accurately. Localities can be selected from drop down menus rather than typing in the full site name, which also ensures that the name is spelt exactly the same every time (try typing in *Lochan na Nigheadaireachd* accurately twice)! More over, a grid reference can be automatically allocated to the location without you having to do anything. In 2005 Borders collated a staggering 26,809 records, all with accurate species names, location names and 1 km square grid references.

Site gazetteers

However, site gazetteers don't grow on trees, and there is a lot of work involved for recorders and their assistants in setting up the "look-up" tables which the database uses to make the gazetteer readily accessible to the rest of us. The Borders database currently boasts 2,770 sites, whilst Jim & Val Wilson recently catalogued every 1 km square in the Clyde recording area - 5,374 place names, a magnificent effort! Automatic look-ups will also be invaluable in the Highland region where Gaelic place names have been adopted.

Species names

Clearly we all need to be using the same species names when submitting our records, but this is more difficult than it seems at first sight. There are almost as many lists of species names as there are species - BOU, BTO, British Birds, Birding World, Euring and others. I am currently trying to rationalise these lists so that you decide which list you prefer to use, and the database does the rest. SOC currently recommends using the BOU list, but some local recording areas prefer the older Voous or BB names and order. It is important that we can accommodate these different options so that everyone feels comfortable with the system.

Another advantage of a computerised system is that you can enter species names using abbreviations rather than the full species name. Many people will be familiar with the BTO 2-letter or 5-letter codes, or even the EURING number. The SOC spreadsheet uses the 2-letter BTO code for data entry. This is my preferred option as the two letters take up least room in your notebook and the fewest keystrokes on the keyboard when you come to entering the record...

Feeding - Bullfinch on rowan *Jimmy Maxwell*

Nest - of Buzzard (freshly lined) *Clive R McKay*

Brood - two Wood Pigeon *Clive R McKay*

Swallow *Jimmy Maxwell*

What name do you use for *Hirundo rustica*?

'Common name'	Swallow
World name	Barn Swallow
BOU list	Barn Swallow
BB list	Barn Swallow
BTO list	Swallow
RSPB adopted name	Swallow
Gaelic name	Gobhlan-gaoithe
BTO 2-letter code	SL
BTO 5-letter code	SWALL
EURING number	0992
SOC modified EURING number	10992
World code	613

Taxonomists using molecular DNA techniques are now continuously coming up with new evolutionary relationships, and changing hitherto long-standing scientific names (e.g. recently for the tits) and rearranging the once familiar Voous order. These changes make compiling a bird report and collating bird records ever more complicated. However, further changes are inevitable, so it is important that we adopt or devise a system that is flexible enough to easily assimilate these changes as and when they occur. This is something that I am working on at the moment.

As field recorders, we need standardised names for difficult species groups that we might enter in our notebooks or that might appear in an annual bird report e.g. Razorbill/Guillemot for counts of distant auks, "alba" wagtails for over-flying "Pied/White" wagtails on migration, singing Blackcap/Garden Warbler for difficult to separate songsters or the many forms of Redpolls. Some biological recording software will not recognise these "vague" names, but they are important to observers, and need to be included in our recording software so that they are not lost.

Adding value to your records

Having provided records on a spreadsheet with a standard species name and locality, as well as the date, number, age/sex/plumage, observer, comments etc., the inclusion of one more piece of information can hugely enhance the value of records. This is the recording unit – in other words, what is your record a "count of". Often this information will be entered as a comment – e.g., singing male, nest with eggs, roost, visible migrants, but it is much better if this information goes in its own field, as in the "details" field in the SOC bird records data-base. This way the data can be quickly sorted and/or filtered, so that for example, at the end of the year the recorder can immediately pull out all breeding records for production of the bird report – or to contribute towards the forthcoming BTO/SOC breeding atlas.

If we as observers submit our records with this additional detail, it can save recorders hundreds of hours sorting and ordering records. Over time, these records which individually might seem insignificant will build into a valuable resource. I look forward to the day when it will be easy to pull up a distribution map of winter counts of Goldeneyes across Scotland, or of migrating Pink-footed Geese, or breeding Garden Warblers, or....

What can our records be used for?

One of the main uses of our records is in the production of the annual local bird report, and these are then summarised in the Scottish Bird Report. Ray Murray is currently working on a new format for the Scottish Bird Report which will make his job (a little) easier, and make the information more readily accessible on the Internet. For further details see Appendix 2 of the 9th Dec 2006 Recorders Gathering Notes in the Bird Recording in Scotland section of the SOC website.

Bird reports are the lifeblood of bird recording. There is a well-recognised relationship between late production of bird reports and subsequent reductions in the numbers of records submitted to recorders. Production of the annual bird report is an onerous task for all concerned, and the SOC is keen to see reports produced by teams rather than this being the responsibility of one or two individuals. SOC also recognises the importance of supporting the production of bird reports. They formed one of the main resources for the authors of the species accounts for *Birds of Scotland 3*. However, imagine how many hours of trawling through copies of local bird reports would have been saved had the records been available on a single archive database. This is the SOC's aim for the future, and it will make the production of *BS4* so much easier!

However, other people are interested in our records too. These include statutory bodies such as SNH, who can make use of our records in several ways to aid biodiversity conservation.

SNH Site Condition Monitoring

Scottish Natural Heritage sees our bird records as a valuable potential contribution to their biodiversity monitoring. These include site condition monitoring for designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Protection areas. Such sites are monitored on a rolling 6-year cycle to assess whether they are in good condition. Sometimes this is measured in terms of the bird aggregations (breeding or non-breeding, depending on

Visible migrants - 74 Waxwings (Barry Buddon - Angus) *Clive R McKay*

Roost flight - 61 Pink-footed Geese (Strathmore Angus) *Clive R McKay*

First for the Western Palaearctic - Cedar Waxwing (Noss, Shetland) *Clive R McKay*

the site) typical of the protected habitat. For example the "upland waters and margins" assemblage includes not only the expected rarer species such as Black-throated Diver and Osprey, but also commoner species such as Little and Great Crested Grebe, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Teal and Tufted Duck. Hence even apparently ordinary records can make a significant contribution.

SNH/RSPB Sensitivity Mapping project

SNH and RSPB have been working jointly to produce a Sensitivity Map based on the distribution of species sensitive to wind farms (Hen Harrier, Black Grouse, Capercaillie, both divers etc.). The map provides a guide to the sensitive siting of wind farms, and is updated regularly. Hence ALL records of sensitive species are valuable and can be made use of for conservation.

The National Biodiversity Network

SNH and SOC are keen to see Scottish Bird Records uploaded onto the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) website. The NBN currently holds over 20 million plant and animal records for the UK, 70% of which come from volunteers (see http://www.nbn.org.uk). You can access these records via the NBN Gateway http://www.searchnbn.net/, which enables you to plot distribution maps at a range of resolutions. Just type the name of a species and away you go. At the moment, birds are poorly represented on the NBN, and this is why SNH and SOC are keen to upload Scottish bird records to the site. The importance of the NBN is highlighted by the fact that the RSPB is planning to upload all its survey data onto the site. This process has just begun – RSPB data sets currently available include Corncrake and Corn Bunting. Another good data set that can be viewed is the JNCC's results for the Seabird 2000 survey. I've just looked up the location of a Common Gull nest that I found last night and discovered that it's in a new 10 km square. Instant access to distribution maps at high resolution is a fantastic resource, and makes the whole recording process more immediate and exciting. I will be uploading the first SOC dataset (for Highland region) onto the NBN in the near future.

Clearly it is important that the locations of rare and sensitive breeding species are not revealed on the NBN. This is achieved by plotting more sensitive records at a much courser resolution – such as the 10 km square resolution used by the BTO Atlases. It would be counter productive if the NBN was responsible for revealing sensitive data, and many safeguards have been put in place to ensure that this doesn't happen. A more in depth article on the NBN will be appear in a future issue of SBN, whilst a summary of a talk given to the 2006 Recorders Gathering by Oliver Grafton of the NBN Trust can be found on the SOC website (see reference above).

Quality control and recording software

This is where the network of Scottish recorders comes into its own. If all these records are going to be collated and used in a multitude of ways, it is essential that the records are vetted and verified, otherwise their value is seriously undermined. Bird recording has always employed strict verification procedures, with records being assessed by the recorder and/or the Local Records Committee who have an in-depth knowledge of the birds in their region. SOC and SNH recognises the valuable role played by the recording network, and by all those submitting records. Thanks to funding from SNH, we are now in a position where we can take bird recording in Scotland into the 21st Century. With this in mind, I am currently looking at a variety of biological recording software programmes with a view to developing a map-based programme for the SOC which will make all the tasks described above as simple, fail-safe and cheap as possible. I would be most interested to hear from any users of existing software such as Recorder6 and MapMate. In the mean time, watch this space!

Clive McKay,
SOC Scottish Bird Records Co-ordinator
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The "quality control team" at the Scottish Bird Recorders Gathering, Waterston House, 9th Dec. 2006 *Ray Murray*

William MacGillivray – Scotland's own "Audubon"

William MacGillivray

Young Cuckoo being fed by Meadow Pipit

The appearance of the BIRDS OF SCOTLAND [BS3] is another landmark in the recording of the status of birds in Scotland. The sequence is a long one, but it did not begin with Baxter and Rintoul. The Scottish pioneer was William MacGillivray, who has a strong claim to the title 'Scotland's Audubon'.

Born in Aberdeen in 1796, raised on a farm near North Town, Harris, MacGillivray left home at the age of twenty two, to take up a tutoring post in Aberdeen, having earned a degree at the University. He is reported to have been a typical Highland Scot, frugal, serious and diligent, with Calvinistic earnestness. Unlike Audubon, he avoided the limelight - love of fame he considered contemptible.

He was in turn assistant to Professor Jamieson at Edinburgh University, Conservator of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, Audubon's amanuensis and eventually Regius Professor of Natural History at Marischal College, Aberdeen, where he died in 1852. He published thirteen books, twenty seven scientific papers, and lest it be forgotten, he was the author of the five-volume Ornithological Biography by John James Audubon, having turned Audubon's franglais into the language of science.

He was also the author of a five-volume work 'THE HISTORY OF BRITISH BIRDS' 1837-1851. It is this work which is the basis for my claim that MacGillivray was the first recorder of the status of birds in Scotland. That it is a little known work is sad. He used a non-Linnean classification scheme, heavily criticized by armchair naturalists. One reviewer said the work was choked with anatomical detail. He used eccentric nomenclature - the Common Sandpiper was the 'White-breasted Weet-Weet'.

The work had to compete with William Yarrel's 'A History of British birds' which began to appear as a part work in 1836. Yarrel's work succeeded in the market place. His birds were illustrated with attractive woodcuts. MacGillivray , who was a fine artist, used steel engraving to illustrate the head only of his species accounts. None of his superb water colour paintings appear - they are all in the Natural History Museum, London probably due to cost considerations. The British public never got to know MacGillivray's work which in some respects was better than Audubon's paintings - they were more naturalistic, less dramatically contrived.

As we celebrate the publication of BS3, let us also celebrate Scotland's own "Audubon", William MacGillivray.

Michael Thomas

Raven by the artist

Windfarms and Golden Eagles, the Argyll Experience

Golden Eagle female *Frank Stark*

'Scottish Bird News' 79 (March 2006) contained an article by David Fotheringham of Scottish Power, in which he suggested that habitat management work at the Beinn an Tuirc wind farm in Kintyre had not only enabled a pair of Golden Eagles to successfully co-exist with the turbines, but had actually improved the conservation status of the species. Moira Baptie of Forest Enterprise Scotland in the same issue referred to their involvement in recreating important open moorland habitat for the eagles at Beinn an Tuirc by removing planted conifers, although it might be argued that these should never have been planted in the first place and Golden Eagle conservation would be promoted by their removal whether or not wind farms are proposed.

The favourite nest crag at Beinn an Tuirc surrounded by conifers now largely clearfelled and replanted *Mike Gregory*

The paper by Walker *et al* in 'Scottish Birds' (Volume 25, June 2005), whilst mainly concerned with an analysis of eagle ranging before and after construction of the wind farm, also suggested that the eagles avoided the turbines and made more use of the area of land cleared of mature conifer forest and managed as part of the mitigation and habitat improvement work. The authors of the latter paper warned against drawing conclusions from a study involving a single pair, but might also have pointed out that this is an isolated pair on the narrow Kintyre peninsular and is not within a group of contiguous pairs - which would have made range adjustment if it happened more difficult or impossible. Anyone reading these articles might well be given the impression that eagles will tolerate wind turbines in the vicinity of their territory, but will avoid flying into them, and that mitigation measures are successful.

The Central Kintyre Management Group has certainly devoted a lot of time and money into trying to improve the fortunes of the Beinn an Tuirc eagles. Unfortunately this has not been matched by a successful breeding record. The last time a chick was reared was in 1997 when survey work for the wind farm commenced. Since construction work started in 2001 breeding productivity has been zero. This can be considered a success only in as much as a pair of eagles continued to occupy the territory and eggs were laid up to the 2005 season. In 2006 no eggs were laid and by the late summer it became apparent that the male bird had disappeared and had to be assumed dead although there was no evidence to suggest that it had, or had not, been killed by a collision with the turbines. In 2007 again no eggs have been laid although more than one immature bird has been seen in addition to the resident female. I have to stress that I cannot claim that the lack of productivity at Beinn an Tuirc is caused by the wind turbines but I am saying that it is not the success story claimed by others.

In marked contrast the five remaining pairs of eagles in Knapdale and Kintyre (i.e. south of the Crinan Canal) have all bred successfully on at least one occasion during the same period since 2001, rearing 12 chicks in total (see table above). In the last twenty years the Beinn an Tuirc territory has had a relatively poor breeding record when compared for example to the Seventies when the birds reared chicks successfully in eight out of ten years. The other pairs in Kintyre and Knapdale have also varied considerably in productivity.

One pair nesting on sea cliffs were consistently successful for a long period but have

Productivity Kintyre/Knapdale						Productivity S. Lorn			
B an T	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**Year**	**B Ghlas**	**SC**	**FG**
FE	+	1	1	+	FE	1987	1		
+	+								
1	+	1	+	+	+	1988	+	1	2
+	+	2	+	+	+	1989	1	1	1
+	+	FE	+	+	+	1990	+	1	1
+	FE	2	+	+	+	1991	1	2	1
+	+	1	+	+	+	1992	FE	FE	FE
FE	+	1	+	+	+	1993	FY	2	1
FE	+	1	+	+	FE	1994	FE	1	1
FE	+	2	+	+	+	1995	FE	1	1
+	+	2	+	+	+	1996	+	2	FE
1	+	FE	+	+	FE	1997	0	2	2
FE	+	1	+	+	+	1998	0	1	1
FE	+	FE	+	1	+	1999	0	+	FE
FE	+	1	+	1	+	2000	0	+	+
FE	+	+	+	1	1	2001	0	+	1
FE	+	FE	1	1	FY	2002	0	FE	FE
FE	+	1	1	FE	+	2003	0	1	1
FE	+	+	1	1	1	2004	0	1	1
FE	+	+	1	+	+	2005	0	FE	FY
+	1	+	FY	1	+	2006	0	1	F

The table shows productivity at Beinn an Tuirc (**B an T –** windfarm site) compared to that recorded at the other five sites (A – E) in Kintyre and Knapdale. **Beinn Ghlas** (windfarm site) is compared to the two closest neighbouring pairs.

FE = Eggs failed, FY = Chicks hatched but failed, + = Birds present but no active nest with eggs or chicks located, 0 = No resident birds, 1 or 2 = Number of chicks fledged

failed to breed for the last few years. Another pair also on sea cliffs reared a chick in 1979 and has a long history of producing infertile eggs, and yet reared a chick in 2006. One territory where in 1986 an adult female was found dead on her nest whilst incubating eggs and the male was also reported dead soon after, has only in recent years started to produce young again.

The Management Group keep most of their reports confidential but their report of February 2006 was made available to the public, and included proposals to introduce Mountain Hares to Beinn an Tuirc in order to try to establish a breeding population as prey for the eagles. So far they have not brought in eagle eggs or chicks from elsewhere although it has been considered. For the moment it is difficult to see how the experience at Beinn an Tuirc can be used to justify an optimistic view of the relationship between wind farms and eagles, or that habitat or prey manipulation works.

However this is not the only Golden Eagle territory that has been subject to wind power development in Argyll. At Beinn Ghlas near Taynuilt, wind farm construction started in 1999. Here turbines were located very close to traditional nest sites, but it was argued by the developer, and accepted by SNH, that habitat management would shift the 'core area' and mitigate any adverse effects. The last time that any eagle chick was reared at Beinn Ghlas was in 1991. This was one of the eagle territories targeted by the Forestry Commission/RSPB radio-tracking project in the early Nineties. Both adult birds were trapped at the nest and fitted with radio transmitters and by the end of 1997 both birds had been found dead. Since then there has been no evidence of occupation by a resident pair of eagles, although the territory is visited occasionally by neighbouring birds. In contrast during the same period since 1999 when construction work was started, two adjacent pairs of eagles have each successfully reared three chicks. The presence of the wind farm seems to have ensured that the Beinn Ghlas territory remains vacant, whereas one of the neighbouring territories [SC] also lost both resident adults in 1999 but these were quickly replaced and after a few years successful breeding was resumed. The other neighbouring territory [FG] was also subject to nest trapping in 1994 and the adult female fitted with a radio transmitter. This bird had gone missing and been replaced by an immature female by the year 2000 and since then breeding attempts have been made each year with average success.

Data collected by members of the Argyll Raptor Study Group for the past 20 years are shown in the table. This compares productivity at Beinn an Tuirc with the other five pairs in Kintyre and Knapdale; and that at Beinn Ghlas with the two adjacent pairs. For a more detailed analysis of long-term data from mainland Argyll see the paper 'Complex effects of habitat loss on Golden Eagles' by Whitfield *et al* in Ibis (2007, p.149). The effects of nest trapping and radio tracking were considered by Gregory *et al* in Ibis (2003, p.145).

Taken together, the experience at both Beinn an Tuirc and Beinn Ghlas ought to suggest that wind farms and Golden Eagles do not go well together and extreme caution should be exercised when considering any further proposals for wind power development in eagle country. Unfortunately there seems to be no shortage of consultants who will prepare reports claiming that wind turbines will have no adverse effect on the eagles provided that the turbines are located outwith some computer-generated 'core area' that takes no account of prey availability, and is based on a number of arguable assumptions. The clearance of existing conifer plantations and future management as grouse moor is then offered either as mitigation of adverse effects or as beneficial habitat improvements. Environmental impact assessments in these terms have been produced to support planning applications for two windfarms close to the most productive eagle territory in mainland Argyll. There are very few regularly productive territories in Argyll and these have to be responsible for ensuring the long-term future of the population, so it is even more important to have a conservation strategy that gives these the most protection. Very little consideration has been given to the floating population of immature birds.

It is not only scientists employed by wind power companies who seem to misinterpret the evidence from these two cases. When dealing with another proposal, the SNH Area Manager for Argyll felt confident enough to write in February 2006 "From studies of existing wind farms in Argyll it would appear that eagles avoid and are displaced from areas with wind farms. SNH is satisfied that the removal of four turbines [from the core area] is adequate to safeguard the future breeding success of the pair of eagles closest to the site."

At the scoping stage of wind power proposals SNH promote the use of a collision risk model but this has doubtful reliability after a scientific appraisal by the BTO in April 2005 (BTO Research Report 401 under contract to English Nature), stated that 'We are unable to recommend use of the collision risk model without further research into avoidance rates'. In any case this theory assumes that birds will not fly in conditions of poor visibility which means that in Western Scotland they would be grounded for most of the year. On one occasion I found an adult eagle that had killed itself by flying into the top of a deer fence and a similar incident has been recorded from Skye. Scientific debate as to the exact value to be attached to an avoidance factor is pointless.

The paper 'Factors constraining the distribution of Golden Eagles in Scotland' by Whitfield et al in Bird Study 54 [in press 2007], shows how on the eastern side of the country in land managed as grouse moors, otherwise suitable habitat is devoid of breeding pairs of eagles. It would be regrettable if any more breeding pairs were to be lost due to the construction of windfarms and it is essential that potential developers and their advisers take due account of the experience to date in Argyll.

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The abandonded nest crag at Beinn Ghlas with turbines behind *Mike Gregory*

Vane Farm at 40

Vane wetland from Vane Hill *RSPB*

A brief history

You may find it hard to believe but the RSPB Vane Farm Nature Reserve reaches middle age this year! Yes, this very popular reserve started life way back in 1967 and has developed in many ways since.

Those who know the reserve will have seen many changes. At first it was just a viewpoint across the adjacent Loch Leven National Nature Reserve. Here visitors including many schoolchildren were shown the delights of wintering wildfowl for which the loch is justly famous. The Nature Centre building, which was restored from an old sheep steading, opened in 1971 as an educational focus for the area. Due to its access to a range of habitats and a commanding a view over the loch, it proved an excellent outdoor educational facility. It was the first of its kind in Britain and possibly even Europe, and to this day remains a very important site for environmental education.

In 1990 the reserve was extended by a purchase of land to the west of the existing low ground, which included a damaged lowland raised mire and grasslands suitable for flooding as wet grassland habitat.

Vane Farm visitor centre from Vane Hill *RSPB*

In November 2002, the reserve was included within the Loch Leven National Nature Reserve, Since birds which use the loch also use the reserve it was a natural expansion of the NNR reflecting its relationship to the adjacent Scottish Natural Heritage managed property and its internationally important designations as a safe area for rearing duck broods.

Habitats and management

Vane Farm extends over 230 ha, stretching from loch shore at 108m to Vane Hill on Benarty Ridge at 356m. The main habitats comprise open water/wet grassland, lowland raised mire, birch woodland and heather/blueberry moorland. Over 20 habitat types occur, supporting 225 species of vascular plants.

Originally, tenancies held by a number of local farmers meant that the amount of habitat management that could be undertaken on the reserve was limited. As a result, attention was at first focused on the woodland area. A long-term planting program ensued, adding species such as rowan and oak to the existing birch woodland. Throughout the programme, care was taken to ensure that open glades were left and edge habitat maximised.

Reception Hide looking towards Bishop Hill and Kinnesswood *RSPB*

In the 1970s, a lagoon and scrape were excavated to cover half of the rough grazing in order to attract waders and wildfowl to roost, feed and nest. These areas can be seen from the wetland trail hides and from the observation room of the Nature Centre.

Twenty years later in the early 1990s, the tenancy of the arable land was given back to the RSPB, allowing management to take place on the low ground of the reserve. Due to the crashing numbers of waders nationwide (resulting from a lack of appropriate habitat), it was decided to flood this low-lying land to create wetland habitats to benefit such species. The success of the scheme is epitomised by the increase in the number of breeding waders. Prior to flooding, there was only one breeding pair of Lapwing on the reserve. In recent years, up to 60 pairs of Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew and drumming/chipping Snipe have bred on the reserve annually.

Water Level Control & Habitat Creation

Water levels on a wet grassland site are controlled by the rate at which water enters and leaves. At Vane Farm water levels are managed via a series of bunds, drop-board and flexi-pipe sluices throughout the reserve, allowing the creation of a variety of habitats such as shallow water and muddy scrapes for passage waders to 'refuel' during their migrations. During the winter, water levels are increased to create more open water habitat for species such as Pink-footed and Greylag Geese and Whooper Swans returning from Iceland to winter here. Winter flooding is perhaps the most important requirement for wintering waterfowl, providing feeding opportunities and secure roost sites.

Vane wetland looking toward Loch Leven *RSPB*

A number of scrapes, lagoons and flight ponds with islands were created in order to add further diversity to the wetland. These low lying, vegetated islands increased the extent of water edge habitat and provide suitable habitat for nesting, feeding and loafing waders and wildfowl. They also aid in breaking down wave action preventing erosion to the bunding surrounding the eastern edge of the flood – the main water body on the reserve.

Highland Cow in Vane wetland *RSPB*

Wet grassland

Several of the fields are cut in July, followed by aftermath grazing. This regime helps to prepare the vegetation for breeding waders and invertebrates. The aim is to leave a 10cm sward in autumn, which is suitable for grazing geese. This height also suits breeding waders in the spring. If seasonal grazing has not produced the desired height, vegetation is topped and removed from the fields by the beginning of October.

Cattle are used because they are more tolerant of wet conditions than sheep; they are relatively unselective in their grazing behaviour, and are therefore better for controlling rank vegetation (e.g. soft rush, Juncus effusus). Fewer cattle than sheep can be used to achieve the same grazing pressure (reducing any risk of trampling nests and young); due to the way they graze, they tend to produce a tussocky sward which is preferred by invertebrates and nesting waders. Highland cattle are used at Vane because they are hardier and more likely to thrive on wet grassland than breeds adapted to intensive systems e.g. dairy cattle.

Mire regeneration

Vane Farm was home to the only example of a lowland peat bog on an RSPB Nature Reserve in Britain. This is the 16ha known as the Waterbutts. After World War II, the mire was drained by the creation of a series of internal and perimeter ditches and planted up with conifers. In the 1970s, these were felled for timber. The bog also has a long history of peat extraction with almost half of the site being cut in the past. By 1991, when the RSPB took over the land, the peat bog was in a much-degraded state – it had significantly dried out and birch scrub had grown up over large areas. Surveys of the ground flora in 1991 and 1994 however revealed that some of the original bog vegetation remained. Given that peat bogs are a threatened habitat both nationally and locally, it was decided to start the mire regeneration process. It was hoped that the restored bog, given its central position within the wetland system at Vane Farm, would have a major role to play in maintaining a high water table within the reserve generally.

The first step was to remove the birch scrub. Brash removal and burning then followed, as did the ongoing spraying of birch regeneration with fosamine ammonium (Krenite) and glyphosate (Round Up). A specialist hydrological contractor was then hired to create 69 peat dams along the ditches simply by pushing the sides of the ditches in, whilst taking care not to disturb existing *Sphagnum* areas. The main ditch from the Waterbutts to the adjacent Coltshouse field was also blocked with earth and a flexi-pipe installed within the bund in order to give a greater degree of control over water levels. The banks surrounding the now flooded peat cutting area are periodically re-profiled to prevent under-cutting. There has been some success, with the area of *Sphagnum* increasing across the mire, although it is a long-term process likely to span decades.

Arable management

Five fields are included in and arable rotation – consisting of spring sown cereal, fodder rape and fallow periods. When the crops are harvested, the stubble is not ploughed in. Weedy stubble fields provide much needed food for farmland birds (such as the Skylark), which have suffered drastic declines in recent years. In addition, there are areas sown with wild bird crop, a mix of sacrificial oilseed rape, kale and barley, which will be left unharvested to provide food for farmland birds during the winter months.

Birds – big and small

As mentioned earlier, Vane Farm's main breeding waders are Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew, Snipe and Oystercatcher. Curlew are present in nationally important numbers. Despite being away from the coast, small numbers of many other species are also seen, especially at passage times. These include Black-tailed Godwits, Knot, Dunlin, Ringed plover, Golden plover, Ruff, and Greenshank. Late summer often sees Water Rails emerging from the cover to reach the receding water's edge, only to run for cover as if embarrassed by being seen!

With its varied habitats, Vane has a wide range of species to see in the summer. In addition to the wildfowl, wetland species such as Reed bunting, Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers occur. Skylarks and Linnets are doing well on the farmland, while birds of the hill include Whitethroat, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Stonechat,

View from scrapes looking toward Castle Island *RSPB*

Tree Pipit, Peregrine and even a few remaining Red Grouse on the top. Ravens have displayed in recent years.

Vane is of course synonymous with geese, in particular the Pink-footed Goose. Pinkies come down to us in autumn and although many pass through to winter south of the border, especially in Lancashire and Norfolk, a substantial number can still be seen during mid-winter. It is reckoned that around half the world population may pass through the Loch Leven area numbering up to 120,000 birds, although not all at the one time. Peak numbers at Vane have reached 9458 this being the mean number for counts between 2001 – 2005, a figure of international importance. One very snowy late winter in 2004, around 18,500 pinks converged on the reserve arable fields, the highest single count so far. Small numbers of other geese (Barnacle, Canada, White-fronted) also occur.

Other wintering wildfowl to look out for include Teal, with a mean number of 2160 from counts done between 2001–2005. The highest reserve count so far, 5,830 occurred in autumn 2001, around 5% of the British population, a figure of national importance. Other regulars include Wigeon, Mallard, Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, Pochard, and a few Goosander, Merganser, and Pintail. Most winters will also produce the odd drake Smew, often accompanied by one or two "redheads". Whooper Swans are also present in nationally important numbers.

As well as all the regular cast members, we have had a few stars at Vane. These range from rare breeders such as Garganey to those which although rare in Scotland, occur from time to time. This group includes Little Egret, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Red crested Pochard, etc Even rarer species for which we have only single records, are Ross's Goose, Red-breasted Goose, Avocet and Spoonbill. In 2005 the reserve had one, possibly two Spotted Crakes calling from the marsh.

Garganey *RSPB*

Little Egret *RSPB*

Visiting the reserve & what we do

The reserve is open to visitors at all times from dawn to dusk. The Visitor Centre is open daily from 10am – 5pm, with the whole site closing completely for two days each week during national public holidays at Christmas and New Year. Toilets are on site including disabled facilities and a baby change.

The reserve has two trails - woodland and wetland. The longer woodland trail ascends through mixed woodland to the summit of Vane hill providing good opportunities to see various summer migrants and other woodland passerines. At 247m above sea level, it also provides stunning views in all directions across the reserve wetlands, Loch Leven and the surrounding countryside. The wetland trail takes visitors along a flatter walk with three water's-edge hides allowing really close views of waterbirds.

Once visitors have tired themselves out with all that walking, they can return to the comfort of the observation room within the combined coffee shop. The large windows overlooking the reserve wetlands and Loch Leven provide a spectacular panorama for people coming to visit. Telescopes in the seated area allow birdwatching in comfort along with a nice cup of coffee. The "Lapwing Café" provides a good range including soup, sandwiches, baked potatoes etc along with a choice of some naughty but nice cakes.

The shop on the lower level of the building has a great range of optical equipment from the leading manufacturers with knowledgeable friendly staff to assist in making the correct choice for your needs. It also carries a wide range of bird books and bird related subjects, but other natural history subjects are also covered. If you are looking for a specific book, they can sometimes be ordered for you if they are not in stock. A large range of birdfoods and birdcare products are also stocked.

The reserve is also very lucky to have a small band of dedicated volunteers who assist with a wide range of work including Centre and reserve. A residential volunteer scheme is also in operation where people, can book to come and live in the free reserve accommodation and assist with mainly land management and conservation work.

After 40 years of RSPB work, a lot has been achieved, but as is the case with conservation work, it needs to keep going to benefit birds, biodiversity and the visiting public - as their motto says "for birds, for people, for ever".

Lets hope that for Vane Farm, life begins at forty!

Dave Jones, Senior Warden,
Vane Farm, RSPB East Scotland Region
Tel: 01577 862355 . Fax: 01577 862013
www.rspb.org.uk/scotland

Visitors birdwatching in Reception Hide *RSPB*

Peter Parnall

Ornithological Folklore
1. The Barnacle Goose

Some years ago I read a book by Edward A. Armstrong ["The Life and Lore of the Bird in art, myth and literature", New York: Crown Publishers, 1975.] which aroused my interest in birds in myth and fable, a logical extension to my lifelong interest in birds in art. This series derives from a lecture I have given on the subject.

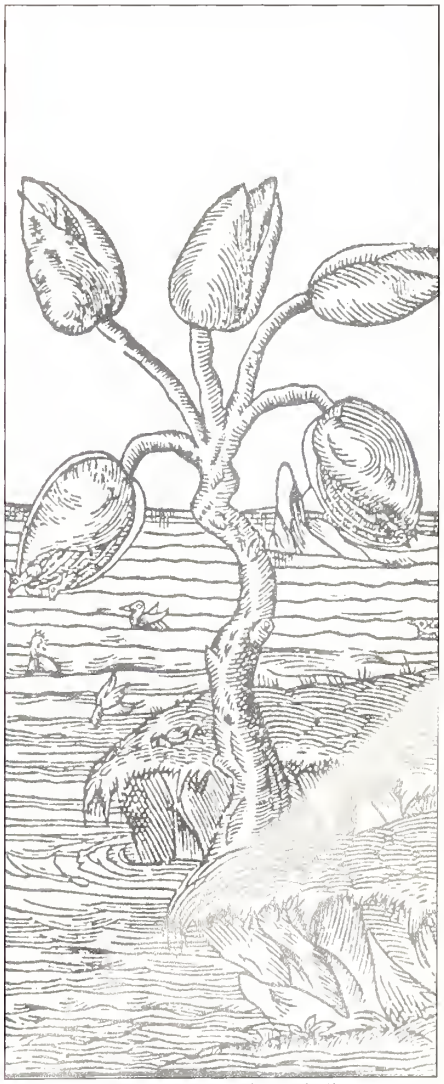
The name Barnacle Goose has its origins in Irish folklore. Giraldus Cambriensis, in a lecture [delivered in Oxford in 1186], Typographia Hibernae, claimed that on a visit to Ireland he had seen Bernacae, Barnacle Geese, generated from shells attached to floating timber. He also reported that since the flesh of the goose emerged from sea shells, the Irish church did not object to the flesh being eaten during Lent and on Fridays! 'Hence Bishops and religious men in some parts of Ireland do not scruple to dine off these birds at the time of fasting, because they are not flesh nor born of flesh'.

The legend is not confined to Ireland. John Gerard's Herball [1597] reports 'There are found in the Northern parts of Scotland and the islands adjacent called Orchades, certaine trees whereupon do grow certaine shells of a white colour tending to russet, wherein are contained little living creatures; which shells in time of maturity doe open, and out of them do grow these little living things, which falling into the water do become fowles, which we call Barnacles.....'

Scotland in winter hosts most of the Spitzbergen and Greenland populations of the Barnacle goose, so we may regard it as a very Scottish bird. Much less common in Ireland, the legend may indeed reflect confusion between Brent and Barnacle Geese.

The attached painting by Peter Parnall captures the spirit of the legend.

Michael Thomas



Engraving taken from Gerard's Herball

NOTES & COMMENT

Hooded Crow attempting to catch a Starling

On 22 April 2007 in the Western Isles, I saw a Hooded Crow amidst a flock of several hundred Starlings and soon realised it was trying to catch one.

Action in flock *Frank Stark*

What initially drew my attention to the incident was the strange behaviour of the Starlings, which were flying around making all sorts of different shapes, as if they were just about to roost. The flock suddenly changed into the shape of a large ball and it was then that I noticed the larger bird chasing them. My first thoughts were of a raptor, a Peregrine perhaps, but when I focused my telephoto lens on the antagonist, I was stunned to discover that it was in fact a Hooded Crow. It seemed to pick out one particular individual which it pursued relentlessly. After twisting and turning the determined corvid lunged at its prey, diving among a sea of wings. Feathers were seen floating towards the ground and for a moment I thought it was going to catch the smaller bird. However, the Starling recovered and rejoined the rest of the flock and the bemused crow, unable to single it out among the hundreds of other birds, flew to a nearby fence post and from there watched the remaining flock manoeuvres.

Frank Stark

Great Spotted Woodpeckers and conifer seeds

This winter I had a regular pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers in my garden. On a morning in January, over a period of five minutes, I witnessed one bird visiting the end of a Scots Pine branch three times. On the third visit, this male proceeded, after five or six pecks to remove a cone. My supposition is that the same bird was involved taking a cone each time. On the first two occasions, the bird flew almost to the ground before disappearing through the shrubbery, but on its final flight, it stopped briefly and held the cone against

Hooded Crow chasing flock *Frank Stark*

Closing in..... *Frank Stark*

a hollow in a Scots Pine stump before again flying out of sight.

From contact with various bird-minded people, it soon became apparent that none had seen this behaviour nor knew anything about it, yet BWP states that conifer seed is an important winter food in Northern Europe. In this commonplace activity the birds use an "anvil" to extract the seed. I am curious to know just how far this feeding habit occurs in Scotland or indeed England. My thanks to Stewart Taylor for additional information.

Harvey Burton

Comments on Rum article

I feel I must write in order to correct some of the statements made in the final paragraph of Bill Bourne's article 'How Rum became a Nature Reserve' (*Scottish Bird News* 83).

Far from proliferating, Rum's herd of red deer has actually declined in recent years through culling, going from 1724 in 1987, to 1408 in 1997 and to 962 in 2007 (official count figures). Red deer are culled over approximately 85% of the Isle of Rum and it is only in the north of the island in the red deer study area that the deer are left unculled. Here the population is naturally regulated by winter mortality and emigration. The red deer on Rum are an important food source for Rum's resident eagle population in the form of carrion and red deer calves. This is an important consideration when the productivity of Rum's Golden eagles in recent years has been quite high, bucking the trend on the rest of the west coast.

The Red Deer Research Project on Rum has amassed a huge amount of data over the years and this data set is unique and extremely valuable, especially given the need to understand the ecological effects of climate change into the future. If the project were moved elsewhere, the data collection would have to start again from scratch and it would take 35 years to get to the current point. I think that it is important that long term research projects such as this should be allowed to proceed while they are still collecting valuable scientific information.

Sean Morris

Pre-migration Redwing behaviour

In a previous SBN, Chris Mylne initiated some correspondence on spring Redwings. Here Ron Youngman adds another strand of observations.

Below our house here, above Ballinluig, we have a field and then a Larch plantation. Redwings occur in most springs and I have become very familiar with their sub-song. This year I took more notice of their behaviour. They were here every day from 16th March till 4th April (they may have been here earlier but we were away 1-15 March). They were very obvious in the mornings and evenings as they all sat in the larches giving sub-song. Around 100 birds were present (my maximum counted, on the field, was 90 but I suspect there were a few still in the trees). They often fell silent and would fly to the ground to feed. They would then return to the trees and give out more sub-song.

In April the sub-song was enhanced by some birds giving hesitant song, and on the 4th one or two birds were giving full song. On the 5th they had gone, so I am assuming that this change to song is indicative of imminent migration.

Ron Youngman

Frank Stark

Oot in the Country

Buzzards ur oan the increase, de yi ken
Aye, a whole flock gangs ower ma hoose.

Och, a puir wee budgie's got oot its cage
C'mon puir wee thing, I'll need tae fun' yi.

Here's the postie, a ken his whustle
But whaur's ma mail, a huvnae oany!

There's the phone gawen awfu early,
Dash oota bed but there's naebudy ringin' me

Answered the bell, I'd just heard.
But the doorstep's vacant.
No a soul staun'in there.

Whit ur thae lapwings da'en up a tree?
Uch! It's they scallywags...
Thae starlings again!

Eleanora

Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the bird picture above and have a chance of winning an SOC carved bird. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 85. Send your single caption by E-mail to jimmy.maxwell@virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3)

John Watson

The winning Caption from *SBN* 83 (see photo above) came from Peter Holt with – At McDonald's Fly-Inn: "Oh no, humburgers swamped in ketchup again!" Well done!

Others were "Don't hide up there, the humans expect you to sing for your supper" – Eleanora Forrester; and " E flat? She's not our sort!" – Mgt. Colles.

Linda Baillie

BOOK REVIEWS

Birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. S. Latta, C. Rimmer, A. Keith, J. Wiley, H. Raffaele, K. McFarland, E. Fernandez. 2006. Helm Field Guide, ISBN: 0 7136 7905 0 (paperback) £24.99

I was pleased to be asked to review this book as my daughter worked in D.R. for a short time and I have visited various countries in that part of the world.

Helm Field Guides are usually very good and this appears to follow suit. It is a little heavy for your rucksack and too big for the pocket of a jacket, but with so many species of birds found on the islands, that is bound to be a small problem.

The introduction and explanatory chapters about the island, topography, habitats, avian conservation, endemic lists, national parks and bird morphology are well laid out and easy to follow on the whole. It is a good idea to read these chapters before you travel, as it gives you a good introduction to the islands, especially with it being shared between two countries. Also the appendices give you a lot of information of where to watch birds, directions to various national parks and a comprehensive bird check list. These help with planning your trip to get the most out of it, adding to the enjoyment of the holiday. The check list with space to write where, when and other notes is an excellent idea as it saves carrying an extra notepad along with the binocs, camera, field guide and water. A pencil tied round your neck is also useful!

The plates are all together with the species accounts following. This is good for quick reference, with comparisons of similar birds close together. I did feel that the colours are perhaps a little vibrant, like the warblers, but colours vary so much in nature that it is difficult to pinpoint an exact colour for the feathers of say the breast of a warbler. It is interesting to have some artists' work intermingled with the plates as this gives an indication of the vegetation found there and sizes of the birds. There is a slight discrepancy with one bird, which has a plate and a painting, where the painting follows the description better than the plate. However, on the whole the plates are very good to follow, with the points to note etc well marked. The descriptions are also very comprehensive, with maps, descriptions, status, similar species, range, calls and local names.

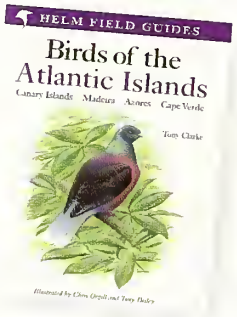
I liked the book and if I ever go there for a trip, I will certainly invest in it. I know that guide books are not always available for countries like Dominican Republic and Haiti, and so this is a definite bonus. Other countries have huge tomes that are far too heavy to take out in the field, and so this is a manageable field guide at a reasonable price which is really only going to be used by a small number of ornithological visitors.

Janet Crummy

Birds of the Atlantic Islands, Tony Clarke, 2006. Christopher Helm, London, 368pp, ISBN 0-7136-6023-6, (paperback) £29.99.

Weighing in at just 100g more than the iconic 'Collins Bird Guide', this is a suitably sized book to put in your baggage. Its coverage is superb if you are bound for the Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands or Cape Verde Islands.

An introduction describes the fascinating island geography, climate, habitats and history; then a very useful guide to the best birding areas and also a section on how to use the book. The large section of 69 colour plates is excellent. Colour is a little strong on some while a few are somewhat simplistic, but these are minor quibbles. The text gives descriptions for all species, including those very familiar to European birders. Thus it stands alone, having all the species likely to be seen in those islands and particularly useful for the endemics. This content is essential for the island birders who may never come to Europe. Racial characteristics of all the endemic subspecies are also well described. The text gives the dates of most vagrants and the species list is astonishing when one considers the geographical position of all the islands. Although the cut-off date for records is 2004, the first appendix describes the remarkable autumn of 2005 when a succession of low latitude storms brought a huge number of Nearctic vagrants into the Azores, spilling over to islands further east. A second appendix gives a full list of species for each of the islands in each group, their status and Portuguese and Spanish names, while a third appendix lists all the endemic subspecies in the same manner. These represent an extremely useful set of checklists for those whose visit is confined to only one or two islands in a group.

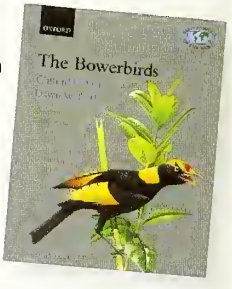


As far as I can see, the taxonomy is bang up to date except that, strangely, the order still begins with divers. I was delighted to find another armchair tick! The African Blue Tit has recently been split from our species and some of its subspecies inhabit the Canaries.

As this is the only comprehensive field guide for the Atlantic islands, I would like to see Spanish and Portuguese editions. For visiting birders, I would unhesitatingly recommend this book as a must – there is no other guide like it.

Norman Elkins

The Bowerbirds, Clifford B.Frith & Dawn W.Frith. 2004. OUP ISBN 0 19 854844 3 £89



This is the tenth volume in the "Bird Families of the World" handbooks. It is written by renowned experts who live within the upland rainforests of Queensland, sharing this area with four of the bowerbird species themselves.

Part 1 contains general chapters on bowerbird evolution, behaviour, breeding biology and sexual selection.

Part 11 follows with species accounts, distribution maps and sonograms. Six colour plates by Eustace Barnes and two colour photographic plates illustrating bowerbirds at court and at their nests, are an excellent complement to the authoritative text.

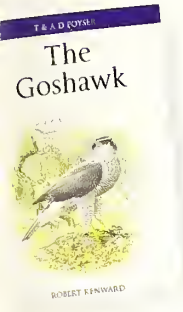
This is a superb series which demands a place on every serious ornithologist's bookshelf.

David Clugston

The Goshawk Robert Kenward, illustrated by Alan Harris. 2006 T & A D Poyser, London. ISBN-10 0-7136-6565-3, ISBN-13 978-0-7136-6565-9 360 pages (hardback) £35

For a species that is still at the pioneer stage of recolonisation in Britain, the Northern Goshawk has been remarkably well studied elsewhere in its range where it is relatively common, particularly in

parts of Europe and North America. This is evident from the impressively long (46-page) reference list at the end of this authoritative and comprehensive new Poyser monograph on the species written by Robert Kenward, who became an expert in radio-tracking while studying Goshawks, first in Oxfordshire and later on the island of Gotland in Sweden.



The book consists of 10 chapters covering, broadly: taxonomy, morphology, breeding, dispersal, diet, predation, demography, falconry, management, and conservation. Some parts of it I found to be heavy going, in several places I wondered if the level of detail provided was really necessary, and in general, I felt that the author could have made a greater attempt to modify his (scientific) writing style in a way that would be more comprehensible to non-scientific readers. It probably will not be appreciated by those who don't like wading through lots of statistics and diagrams.

To some extent, these criticisms are overcome by the helpful list of conclusions provided at the end of each chapter, and, despite my reservations, I have no doubt this book will appeal to dedicated raptor enthusiasts. There were certainly many sections that fascinated me, describing, for example, painstaking research into the hunting behaviour of city-dwelling Goshawks in Hamburg, or the rapid "contemporary evolution" of smaller males and larger females which was caused by a decline in woodland grouse (prey) density in northern Finland. One of the things that interests me most about Goshawks concerns their previous history and current recolonisation in Britain. These topics do get discussed, eventually, but, in contrast to some other parts of the book, I would like to have seen them covered in greater detail.

John Savory

Birds of the Western Palearctic interactive BWPi version 2.0 Various authors. 2006. Birdguides Ltd and Oxford Univ. Press ISBN 1 898110 39 5 Interactive DVD-ROM Price 139.00

There they are, sitting in my library, the original nine volumes of BWP, the two volumes of the Concise Edition, and now, on a DVD I have the whole lot, including updates, in my laptop! This is the latest edition of BWP in multi-media format, covering 970 species, 6 million words of text, 5,500 annotated illustrations, 2,700 video clips, maps, audio recordings, and it's all compatible with either Windows or Apple Macintosh. Installation is straightforward. Having inserted the disk, open it [per My Computer], and click on 'Read me first'. If you want to install everything on your hard disk, you will need 7.5 GB of free disk space. Then go to 'Set up', which puts you into the system.

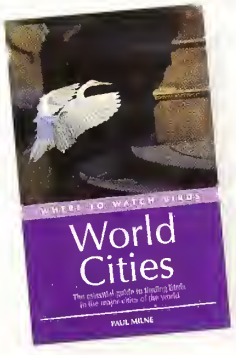
Now you are in ornithological heaven. The Great Crested Grebe page has twenty eight boxes to select from seven ID portraits, breeding displays, eggs, an annual cycle diagram and nine video clips including the penguin dance and a dramatic head-shaking display. You can play the song/calls, you can read the text of the Handbook or the Concise edition, and there is a page for your own notes. And you have a further 969 species to enjoy.

Two problems. This source is so rich you may never be tempted outside again. And, you need another piece of kit - a duster to occasionally pass over those expensive books sitting on your bookshelf. If you have the books, you do not HAVE to have this DVD, but then you do not have to buy that new pair of binoculars! Can Christmas be far off?

Michael Thomas

Where to watch birds in cities. Paul Milne, 2006. Christopher Helm ISBN 10:0-7136-6983-7 ISBN-13: 978-0-7136-6983-1 paperback £16.99

This book is aimed at the (probably increasing) numbers of people who visit cities on business or for short breaks and want to include a bit of bird watching if they can. The cities included are scattered worldwide, but with 20 out of 61 in Europe. For each site there are brief seasonal species lists, sketch maps, and directions to get there by car and often by bus/train also. For most cities several sites are given - within the city or up to around 40 miles outside.

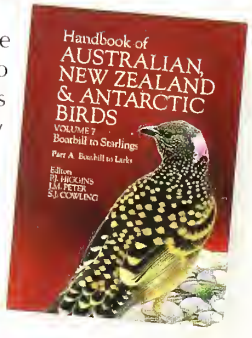


The idea is a good one, but this book is not without its problems, to judge from the few European entries I have been able to check. The author rightly recommends purchase of a local map at (say) 1 in 50,000, and some of the book maps will do no more than orientate you on this. Others may show may show a more detailed site layout, but sometimes omit key details eg a potentially useful railway but no station. There are enough careless errors, even including one London site, where travel directions are just wrong (e.g. for Staines Reservoir, trains go from Waterloo not Marylebone, and Lyon is west Geneva not east) to make one uneasy about the rest.

Nevertheless, for a short visit to any of these cities, a cautious glance at this book could be useful, but check all details before leaving your hotel or campsite.

John Law

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Vol. 7, part A: Boatbill to Larks. Vol. 7, part B: Dunnock to Starling. **Editors: P.J.Higgins, J.M.Peter & S.J.Cowling,** 2006. Oxford University Press. Australia. ISBN 10 0 195 55884 7 (volume 7A), 10 0 195 5588 5 (volume 7B)



Priced at £245 the pair, these final two volumes complete this superb series, widely acclaimed as the key reference work on the birds of this huge region. First inspired by our own BWP, the Royal Australian Ornithologists' Union began the immense task of recruiting and managing a team of both amateur and professional ornithologists - the result has been quite staggering. Where the information is known, most species are handled with the utmost thoroughness with the list of references running to many pages. Complementing the text are the usual distribution maps, sonograms and frequent line-drawings. The colour plates by a variety of artists are very attractive and lifelike.

All in all a very handsome set of books, but at nearly £1000 for the complete series, perhaps somewhat beyond the average birder's pocket. Thankfully they can be consulted in the SOC's Waterston Library, Aberlady.

David Clugston

Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 11: Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers. Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott & David Christie, 2006. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. ISBN 978-84-96553-06-4. 798pp. £138.

When this series was first announced I doubted that it would ever be completed, as has happened with many other grand projects, and failed to subscribe. This has proved to be a wrong and costly error which I have now corrected! The editors are to be wholeheartedly congratulated in getting this series well on the way to completion. For the dedicated world lister, this is an essential set to own with quite stunning plates and an authoritative text. It is also bang up to date as I found when I looked up the text for the March 2006 re-discovery of Large-billed Reed Warbler in Thailand and discovered a photograph of the bird with supporting information. Naturally for many little known species the data is pretty scant, but at the very least you have colour pictures of the birds and a map showing where they occur. If you haven't already subscribed think seriously about doing so - there are some good deals on offer from the publisher. Otherwise this wonderful set can be consulted in the SOC's Waterston Library at Aberlady.

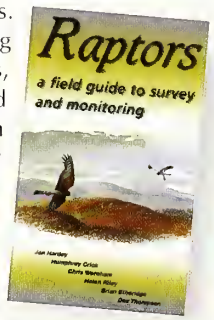
David Clugston

Raptors – a field guide to survey and monitoring. Jon Hardey, Humphrey Crick, Chris Wernham, Helen Riley, Brian Etheridge, Des Thompson. First Published: 2006. The Stationary Office, Edinburgh. ISBN: 0 11 497321 0 £16.71 (inc. CD-ROM)

Raptors are apex predators and sit at the top of the food chain. Long-term trends in raptor breeding populations provide us with important information about the background health of the environment and can alert us to environmental problems. For example, poor breeding success in British Peregrine Falcons during the 1960s and the subsequent link with pesticide poisoning, resulted in the banning of toxic organchlorine pesticides and their derivatives in the UK. Data on raptor breeding distribution is increasingly being used to inform windfarm development in our uplands and there is now a greater demand for high quality raptor breeding data. However, raptors breed at low densities in remote and inaccessible environments, presenting real challenges to any field worker attempting to survey and monitor breeding populations. For this reason, breeding data on raptor numbers, productivity and distribution is often incomplete.

This book attempts to address the problem by presenting a comprehensive description of the field methods used to survey and monitor all 15 regularly breeding British species of diurnal raptor as well a six species of owl. A section summarising the status and field methodology to survey all five irregularly breeding species is also included. The book is divided into two parts.

Part one serves as an introduction by effectively summarising existing raptor monitoring networks and partnerships in the UK and then goes on to define breeding season parameters. A range of generic field techniques used to study these birds are described and the important issue of good field practice is addressed. For example, it provides important information on licensing requirements when visiting raptor nests and ringing chicks. Guidance on identifying raptor signs such as kills, droppings, pellets and feathers to establish occupancy of a territory is particularly useful, although I feel that this section could be improved by the addition of photos illustrating these signs.



Part two describes the breeding biology and survey techniques for each species in a series of species accounts. The annual breeding cycle for each species is outlined in tables and these serve as a very useful guide when considering the timing of nest visits. A series of appendices provides the latest data on breeding population estimates and trends as well as useful contact addresses. The book is accompanied by a CD containing raptor vocalisations.

This book is a welcome addition and a comprehensive field guide to raptor study which will contribute to its promotion and also conservation in the UK. The success of this book is largely due to the extensive contribution of a dedicated band of over 300 experienced volunteers who work in a network of Raptor Study Groups. A reprint has just been produced and due to popular demand, I would not be surprised if we see a further reprint in the future.

Mike Thornton

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. SOC is a registered Scottish charity (no SCO 009859).

www.the-soc.org.uk

Passwords to access members' web pages on the new SOC web site: 'Little' & 'Plover'